News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Wyoming's First West Nile Virus-Positive Horse Identified for 2006

CHEYENNE-A horse in Campbell County identified Friday is the first West Nile virus (WNV)-positive animal found in Wyoming this year according to the Wyoming Department of Health.

Terry Creekmore, West Nile virus surveillance coordinator, said no 2006 human cases have yet been identified in Wyoming. Last year, 12 humans tested positive in the state with two fatalities. West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause a potentially serious illness in humans. Mosquitoes spread the virus after feeding on infected birds and then biting people, other birds and other animals.

Creekmore said that 38 birds and 18 horses have been tested for WNV at the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory so far this year. Last year, the Veterinary Laboratory tested 102 horses and 148 dead birds for WNV with the first positive horse on June 10 and the first positive bird on June 23.

"It's still too early to tell what kind of season we will have for West Nile virus," Creekmore said. "Transmission of the virus by mosquitoes is highly dependent on a number of factors including weather and effectiveness of local mosquito control programs."

The Wyoming Department of Health is soliciting dead birds through the West Nile virus hotline: 1-877-WYO-BITE. The department prefers to test crows, ravens, magpies and jays. People who find a dead bird should call the hotline for instructions rather than sending the bird to state or local health agencies. If the bird(s) are suitable for testing, callers will be advised on how to handle and submit the carcass. Results are usually available within one week. Persons will be notified ONLY if the bird is positive. For a number of reasons, not every bird that is submitted will be tested.

Those finding raptors such as hawks, owls or eagles should contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to arrange for carcass transport and testing. Persons with questions about horse testing should contact Dr. Todd Cornish at the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory at (307) 742-6638.

Most people infected with WNV do not develop signs or symptoms of infection. Of those people who do develop clinical illness, most develop mild symptoms like fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph nodes. A very small percentage of persons infected with WNV develop West Nile neuroinvasive disease (i.e. meningitis or encephalitis). Symptoms of West Nile neuroinvasive disease may include severe

headache, fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions and paralysis. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider.

More information on WNV and prevention strategies is available on the Wyoming Department of Health's West Nile virus website at: www.badskeeter.org or by calling the West Nile virus hotline at: 1-877-WYO-BITE.

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